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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate the effect of participation in the first-year Coordinated Vocational Academic Education Program (CVAE) and the effect of participation in work experience on the knowledge of basic employment skills and work attitudes of disadvantaged youth in selected Georgia high schools. The study compared the scores on the six subtests of parts I and II of the Program for Assessing Youth Employment Skills (PAYES) attained by first year CVAE completers with those of new CVAE students. The population for the study consisted of 151 CVAE programs for disadvantaged secondary vocational students operating in Georgia in 1980; data were gathered from 1,122 students from 23 schools. Analysis of the data indicated that disadvantaged students who had completed one year in the CVAE program had significantly higher scores on four of the six PAYES subtests than did new CVAE students. Two subtests on attitudes toward supervision and self-confidence were not significant but showed a positive direction. The findings support the contention that programs such as CVAE and participation in work experience improve attitudes toward work, supervision, and self and increase cognitive knowledge of jobs, job-seeking, and practical reasoning skills as measured by the PAYES. Since scores attained on the PAYES by the CVAE subjects were below suggested competency levels, it was recommended that appropriate activities be incorporated into the CVAE curriculum to increase preemployment and job seeking skills and attitudes. (KC)

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THE EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATION IN CVAE AND WORK EXPERIENCE ON THE BASIC EMPLOYMENT SKILLS AND WORK ATTITUDES OF DISADVANTAGED HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH

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INTRODUCTION

Technology, which has enabled human beings to send exploratory missions into the solar system and to reach the moon, has also resulted in rapid changes in the world of work. At the same time, education and preparation for employment in this advancing technological age has lagged behind. Each decade has provided a focus for educational endeavors. In the 1960's it was "equality" and "relevance;" in the 1970's it was "accountability." These catch words have not lost their impact, but in the 1970's and 1980's a new focus evolved: "employability." "Taxpayers want schools that will provide their young with skills that will make them employable." (Ferrin & Arbeiter, 1975, p. 1). Recently this focal point has had as its theme, "back to the basics." Emerged in this concept is preparation to enter a "high tech" society.

Employment has proven plentiful for persons with adequate technical skills, even during periods of recession. Persons without such skills to sell in the market place, or without the ability to sell the skills that they do have, face considerable difficulties in finding meaningful employment. In the past, unskilled manual jobs were a basis from which to start a career and were plentiful for youth who had little training or education. However, over the last decade, there has been a steady decline in the number of unskilled jobs available. Technology is replacing human muscle and robotics engineering is providing the source to end hazardous routine work on the assembly line. The continually rising cost of employment (insurance, fringe benefits, inflation, government regulated paperwork, and the minimum wage requirements) is also obliterating former opportunities for low-skill threshold work experiences. As early as 1970, 91% of all jobs required a high school degree (Westcott, 1977).

A January, 1980, White House Background Report emphasized that the traditional picture of the American workplace will soon no longer be accurate as the post-industrial economy is service-oriented, white collar, and technical. Service jobs in the past 30 years have grown 120%, while manufacturing jobs have grown only 30%. The professionals' and managers' category of jobs increased from 1 in 12 in 1965 to 1 in 4 in 1980 (White House Press Office, January, 1980).

Unemployment, a critical problem facing youth today, is viewed as a serious national problem (Gess, 1978; Sullivan, 1979). Present-day teenagers comprise only one-tenth of the nation's labor force but they comprise one-fourth of the unemployed (Green, 1978). Between October, 1967, and October, 1976, the overall rate of teenage unemployment rose from 13.5% to 18.2%, while it increased to 23% in the central cities' area (Westcott, 1977; Zell, 1978). By 1979, after four years of extraordinary job expansion, the unemployment rate for teenagers still averaged 16.1%, compared to 5.8% for the total work force. The rate for black and other minority teenagers was 33.5% (Employment and Training Report of the President, 1980). The unemployment rate for teenagers continued to rise through December 1982 when it reached 24.5%. The rate for unemployed black teenagers had climbed to 48.1% by July of 1983 in comparison to white teenage unemployment of 19.5%. (Monthly Labor Review, 1983)

According to Venn (1975), when young people were at home on the farm they were given responsibilities to fulfill and were able to use their muscles to the advantage of the family. They were a necessary part of the team. Children went to school to learn the few things that could not be learned in the home or to receive an educational base to become a member of a specific profession. As parents have moved their major productive activities away from the home, young people have been excluded from the modeling of meaningful adult work roles. This exculsion has been further reinforced by changes in the family structure, increased leisure time, television, and a socity of surfeit rather than need. In turn, our educational systems often prolong a dependent state for youth rather than encourage a significant transition from school to the adult workplace. Many school systems today are adding additional coursework to be taken before graduation. Venn (1976) also emphasized that few young people "adequately tie the learning in school to the reality of work in a technological society." (p. 1).

For 63 years, vocational education instruction in America's high schools has provided young people the opportunity to leave school with a saleable entry-level skill, although the number of students served has comprised only a small part of the general school population. Many students leaving high school today are deficient in basic academic skills as well as in vocational skills. Former President Carter stated in his "Youth Education and Employment Proposals for 1980" that the lack of basic skills is the most serious barrier for young people for successful entry into the labor market. For several million youth each year, the transition from school to jobs or further education and training does not appear to be effective. Threshold work experiences apparently play a critical role in a young person's life sequence (Adams & Mangrum, 1978; Ferrin & Arbeiter, 1975; Freeman & Wise, 1979; Reubens, 1977).

The January, 1980, Background Report by the White House Press Office on "Youth Employment Initiatives" stated that "four major groups bear a disproportionate share of unemployment."

1. High school dropouts. Unemployment rates for high school dropouts are two to three times those of high school graduates, with the dropout rate for blacks set at 25% and 40% for Hispanics.

2. Women. Female workers enter the employment market at an earlier age, as a rule, but by age 25 they earn only 65% of the average male wages. (Labor force participation of female teenagers is low in all areas, but exceptionally low for young black women who are less likely to be enrolled in school and more likely to be mothers (Westcott, 1977, p. 16).

3. Teenagers. In 1955 the white teenager unemployment rate was 13%, while the rate for black teenagers was 16%. In 1979 the white teenager unemployment ratio was about the same, but the black youth unemployment rate had risen to 33%. A contributing factor, still in evidence, is that while the overall number of teenagers has declined, the number of minority teenagers has continued to grow. (The latest statistics show a 48% black teenager unemployment rate. Monthly Labor Review, 1983).

4. Economically depressed teenagers. When teenagers who fit the category of economic disadvantage enter the labor market they usually do so at lower wages and never catch up.

Private sector employers have told the President's Task Force on Unemployment that "they want employees who can read and write and have demonstrated a reliable work history" (White House Fact Sheet, 1980). Therefore, disadvantaged youth must develop basic academic skills as well as job-seeking, job-getting, and job-holding skills in order to successfully compete in the workplace of the 1980's.

Federal Response to Youth Unemployment

In reaction to the youth unemployment problem, Congress enacted legislation authorizing supplementary funds to aid states in providing vocational education, training, and support services for disadvantaged young people.

According to Resurge '79, the HEW-USOE manual for identifying, classifying, and serving the disadvantaged and handicapped under the Vocational Education Amendments of 1976,

> the classification system for the disadvantaged is designed to include all persons who have academic or economic handicaps and who require special services and assistance to enable them to succeed in vocational education programs. (p. 15)

"Academic disadvantage" was defined in the Federal Register as a person who lacked reading, writing, and/or mathematical skills or who performed below grade level. This included limited English speaking students. "Economic disadvantage" for these purposes was defined as (1) having family income below the national poverty level, (2) the student, their parent(s) or guardian(s) were unemployed and/or were on public assistance, or (3) the student was institutionalized (Federal Register, Vol. 42, No. 191, Section 104.804).

Since 1963 federal legislation for vocational education has emphasized support services for disadvantaged and handicapped students designed to enable them to be successful in vocational education programs. The 1963 law simply stated that special needs students were to be served by vocational education. However, in 1968, states were required to spend 25% of their basic grant for special needs students -- 15% for the disadvantaged and 10% for the handicapped. Under Title II of the 1976 Education Amendments (P.L. 94-482), the amount was increased to 30%--10% for the handicapped programs and 20% for the disadvantaged. Title II further required that these funds be matched dollar for dollar at the state and/or local level. The money for the disadvantaged was to be used to provide supplemental services and programs to help students succeed in regular vocational education programs (Resurge '79, p. 1).

Georgia's Response to Federal Legislation

In Georgia's secondary schools, one aspect of the support services provided for disadvantaged youth has been the Coordinated Vocational Academic Education Program (hereafter indicated as CVAE). The program in Georgia is described as:

> The CVAE program is designed to remediate underachieving, disadvantaged, alienated youth whose behavioral patterns, lack of basic skills and previous school records indicate a high probability that they will not be able to succeed in the regular secondary vocational programs and/or are economically deprived. (Gibson & Baldwin, 1977, p. 1)

"Many youth require a more concrete type of learning experience--that is, learning by doing or active involvement--if they are to adequately master basic skills" (Georgia State Department of Education, 1970). Orientation to the world of work through a relevant curriculum, vocational education, vocational guidance, and exploratory work experience helps students to see greater meaning both in work and in their educational experience, and will ease the transition from school to work (Lee, 1976).

Special programs for disadvantaged high school students across the U.S. have traditionally emphasized employment skills in their curricula (Wircenski, 1979). CVAE is an intervention program designed to help disadvantaged high school youth develop basic employability skills and responsible attitudes toward work. Employment skills and work attitudes have been taught as part of the regular CVAE curriculum; these skills and attitudes have also been learned in on-the-job situations as an exploratory work experience and job placement component has been part of the CVAE program since its inception (Gibson, 1977; "Site Report No. 2," 1979).

There has been some controversy during the past two decades concerning the value of work experience and career education programs for the disadvantaged. In Georgia, as of March, 1980, there had been no studies to evaluate the CVAE program to identify the effects associated with program participation, work experience, employment skills, and attitudes toward work.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Since the unemployment rate for disadvantaged youth is higher than for other comparable youth groups, it is even more essential that these students develop adequate employment skills and acceptable work attitudes that will enhance not only the probability of employment but also job maintenance. This study was designed to investigate the effect of participation in the first-year CVAE program (Status) and the effect of participation in work experience (Work) on the knowledge of basic employment skills and work attitudes of disadvantaged youth in selected Georgia high schools, as measured by the six subtests of Part I and Part II of the Program for Assessing Youth Employment Skills (PAYES)

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Methods

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of participation in the first-year CVAE program (Status) and work experience (Work)

on the knowledge of basic employment skills and work attitudes of disadvantaged youth enrolled in the CVAE I program in selected Georgia high schools. The study compared the scores on the six subjects of Part I and Part II of the PAYES attained by first-year CVAE completers with those of new CVAE students enrolled in the Georgia CVAE program. The ex post facto research design used in this study is illustrated in Figure 1. F-tests, using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), and t tests were used with the conventional .05 level of significance established to reject four null hypotheses of the study.

FACTORS		MEASUREMENTS	
Status	Work Experience	Work Attitudes	Cognitive Measures of Employment Skills
Group I CVAE I Completers	Work Experience	A, B, C	A, B, C
	No Work Experience	A, B, C	A, B, C
Group II New CVAE Students	Work Experience	A, B, C	A, B, C
	No Work Experience	A, B, C	A, B, C

Figure 1. Research design.

The factors used in Figure 1 have the following definitions.

Status. The term "status" was defined as follows:

1. Group I-- CVAE completers: those students who were completing their first year in the CVAE program in the spring of 1980;

2. Group II--new CVAE students: those students who enrolled in the CVAE programs in the same schools in the fall in 1980.

Work. The term "work" was used as follows:

1. Work Experience: a factor to indicate subjects who participated in some type of valid work experience. For the purpose of this study, students were identified as having work experience if they had participated in either a school-supervised work experience activity for a minimum of three months, or had held a job acquired through their own initiative for three months or more before entering the CVAE program.

2. No Work Experience: a factor to indicate subjects who indicated that they had not participated in valid work experience.

Measurements. The Program for Assessing Youth Employment Skills (PAYES) which was used as the testing instrument, has two parts and six subtests.

Part I: Attitudinal Measures	Part II: Cognitive Measures
IA: Job-Holding Skills	IIA: Job Knowledge
IB: Attitude Toward Supervision	IIB: Job-Seeking Skills
IC: Self-Confidence	IIC: Practical Reasoning

The PAYES was developed specifically to test disadvantaged adolescents and young adults with low verbal skills in the areas listed above. It has pictures to help clarify the questions and is intended to be administered orally to small groups. Development of the PAYES by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) began in 1967 under the sponsorship of the U.S. Department of Labor. The purpose was to research and design a test appropriate for assessment of unemployed school dropouts and minority youth. It was designed to be specifically "useful for enrollees in CETA centers, skills centers, vocational high school special needs classes, adult basic education centers, and youths in correctional institutions" (Educational Testing Service, 1979, p. 1).

Each subject from Groups I and II completed Parts I and II of the PAYES test battery, which were then computer scored. The data were statistically analyzed for significance and the results were used to test the four null hypotheses used in the study.

Type of Research

A 2x2 (Status x Work) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was employed for the purposes of comparing the Status means of the CVAE I completers with those of the new CVAE students on the six subtest scores of the PAYES. The analysis was also conducted to compare the means of the CVAE students who had work experience with those who had no work experience on the six subtest scores of the PAYES. Status and Work were the two independent variables, while the PAYES subtests were the six dependent variables.

PROCEDURES

Population and Sample Size

The finite population (N) for this study consisted of 151 CVAE programs for disadvantaged secondary vocational students operating in the state of Georgia in 1980. These programs were located in six geographic regions throughout Georgia. Of these 151 CVAE programs, 23 programs (n) were randomly selected using a cluster sampling technique. Five additional programs were randomly selected to provide for a larger sample. The regional structure and the list of programs were obtained from the State Department of Education, Office of Vocational Education.

Collection of Data

A schedule of testing was devised and a pilot test site chosen. Necessary revisions of instructions were made as a result of the pilot test site. Two classes of CVAE students, who were completing their first year in CVAE in the spring of 1980, were randomly selected in each school and tested by their program coordinators. In the fall of 1980, two classes of new CVAE students, who had recently enrolled in the CVAE I programs in the participating schools, were tested. The answer sheets were computer scored and the results used in the statistical analysis.

Of the 28 schools originally included in the study, five schools had to be dropped from the final data analysis. After removal of unusable or incomplete score sheets, 1,122 students made up the final number of subjects.

RESULTS-FINDINGS

The four null hypotheses used in the study were rejected at the .001 level of significance. Participation for one year in the CVAE program had a significant effect on the scores achieved on the PAYES by CVAE I completers compared to new CVAE students (Hypothesis I). The results validated significant main effects for the independent variables Status and Work, $p-<.001$ (See Table 1).

The statistical analysis indicated that disadvantaged students, who had completed one year in the CVAE program, had significantly higher scores than did the new CVAE students on four of the six subtests. The multivariate F was significant at the .001 level. Two subtests, Attitude Toward Supervision and Self-Confidence, were not significant, but showed a positive direction. Univariate F's were significant at the .05 level for Job-Holding Skills and the .001 level for Job Knowledge, Job-Seeking Skills, and Practical Reasoning. (See Table 2)

Table 1
Summary of Multivariate Analysis of Variance with Six Dependent Variables: Job-Holding Skills, Attitude Toward Supervision, Self-Confidence, Job Knowledge, Job-Seeking Skills, and Practical Reasoning Test Scores

Source	df	F
Status	6, 1113	5.663*
Work	6, 1113	7.192*
Status x Work	6, 1113	.616 n.s.

*$p < .001$
n.s. = Nonsignificant

Table 2
Summary of Univariate Analysis of Variance of Six Dependent Variables for the Main Effect of Status

Source	df	MS	F
I-A Job-Holding Skills	1, 1118	45.812	4.605*
I-B Attitude Toward Supervision	1, 1118	6.965	.092 n.s.
I-C Self-Confidence	1, 1118	12.336	.943 n.s.
II-A Job Knowledge	1, 1118	330.198	11.785**
II-B Job-Seeking Skills	1, 1118	158.391	12.127**
II-C Practical Reasoning	1, 1118	386.234	19.761**

*$p < .05$
**$p < .001$
n.s. = nonsignificant

Participation in work experience had a significant effect on the scores achieved on the PAYES by CVAE subjects (Hypotheses II, III, and IV). Interaction effects for Status and Word were not significant. In every instance, the CVAE students who had participated in work experience scored significantly higher ($p < .01$ or $p < .001$ levels) on the six subtests of the PAYES than did CVAE students who had no work experience. (See Table 3, Hypothesis II)

Table 3
Summary of Univariate Analysis of Variance of Six Dependent Variables for the Main Effect of Work

Source	df	MS	F
I-A Job-Holding Skills	1, 1118	85.636	8.609*
I-B Attitude Toward Supervision	1, 1118	1375.835	18.237**
I-C Self-Confidence	1, 1118	88.534	6.765*
II-A Job Knowledge	1, 1118	610.029	21.772**
II-B Job-Seeking Skills	1, 1118	314.836	24.105**
II-C Practical Reasoning	1, 1118	447.822	22.912**

*$p < .01$
**$p < .001$

Table 4
Summary of the t Values of CVAE I Completers, Work Experience Compared to No Work Experience on Six Dependent Variables

Source		Mean Difference	$SE_{\bar{X}_1-\bar{X}_2}$	df	t Value
I-A	Job-Holding Skills	3.94	.275	599	1.43 n.s.
I-B	Attitude Toward Supervision	2.111	.713	599	2.96**
I-C	Self-Confidence	.770	.305	599	2.53*
II-A	Job Knowledge	1.715	.435	599	3.94***
II-B	Job-Seeking Skills	1.256	.308	599	4.08***
II-C	Practical Reasoning	1.335	.369	599	3.62***

*p .05
**p .01
***p .001
n.s. = nonsignificant

Five of the six subtest means for comparison of CVAE I Completers with work experience to CVAE I Completers with no work experience were statistically significant summarization of t tests in Table 4. (Hypothesis III).

The t-tests for differences between the means were employed for new CVAE students with work experience and new CVAE students with no work experience. Five of the six subtests showed statistical significance at the .01 level. In every case, the new CVAE students with work experience scored higher than those with no work experience. The summary of results is found in Table 5 (Hypothesis IV).

Table 5
Summary of the t Values of New CVAE Students, Work Experience Compared to No Work Experience, on Six Dependent Variables

Source	Mean Difference	$SE_{\bar{X}_1-\bar{X}_2}$	df	t Value
I-A Job-Holding Skills	.742	.255	519	2.91*
I-B Attitude Toward Supervision	2.364	.769	519	3.07*
I-C Self-Confidence	.330	.307	519	1.08 n.s
II-A Job Knowledge	1.219	.473	519	2.58*
II-B Job-Seeking Skills	1848	.310	519	2.74*
II-C Practical Reasoning	1.199	.385	519	3.11*

*p < .01
n.s. = nonsignificant

Conclusions

It was concluded that:

1. Participation in the CVAE program for one year and/or in work experience enhanced both the attitudes of the CVAE I students toward work and their cognitive knowledge of basic employment skills.

2. The PAYES appears to be an appropriate instrument for assessing the work attitudes and knowledge of basic employment skills for disadvantaged youth.

Specifically:

a. Subtest IA - Job-Holding Skills

The data supported the conclusion that the majority of the CVAE I subjects, both completers and new enrollees, were aware of the behaviors necessary to hold a job. All subjects, except for the new male CVAE students with no work experience, scored within the suggested high score band. Although this subtest had an apparent "ceiling effect," its usefulness would be to identify those students with low scores so that counseling and instruction in this area could be initiated.

b. Subtest IB - Attitude Toward Supervision

It is evident from this subtest that there was a wide dispersion of the mean scores between subject groups with work experience compared to those with no work experience. The higher scores indicated that attitudes toward supervision were positively affected by subject participation in work experience. However, as the mean scores for all subjects were below recommended levels, the researcher was unable to conclude if these low scores were the result of continued poor attitudes, which are common to CVAE students, or if the abstract wording of the questions for this particular subtest was responsible for the low scores.

c. Subtest IC - Self-Confidence

Means for subtest I-C were below the suggested high score band by 5%. Research by the developers of the PAYES supports the conclusion that when scores on Self-Confidence do not reach the suggested levels, and when these scores are combined with low scores in Job-Seeking Skills and Attitudes Toward Supervision, students may be unlikely to follow through properly on job search or display appropirate work behaviors (Educational Testing Service, 1979).

d. Subtest IIA - Job Knowledge

The mean scores on Job Knowledge ranged from 20% to 26% below the suggested high score band. However, both groups with work experience had significantly higher means ($p < .001$) than did the other subjects. The data thus supports the conclusion that work experience reinforces the information that is studied in the CVAE classroom concerning education levels, working hours, and wages for various jobs. The low scores overall may reflect a need for more emphasis in this area.

e. Subtest IIB - Job-Seeking Skills

CVAE I subjects with work experience had higher scores than those with no work experience. CVAE completers had significantly higher means ($p. < .001$), but as a total group, the mean scores of the subjects were approximately 40% below the suggested high score band. The data supports the conclusion that although the scores were significant ($p. < .001$) between the various groups of subjects, the CVAE I students had not achieved a high competency in this area.

f. Subtest IIC - Practical Reasoning

The lowest means of all the six subtests were recorded by the CVAE I subjects on Practical Reasoning. The means averaged 45% below the suggested high score band. CVAE completers with work experience had significantly higher scores (p. .001) than did the other CVAE subjects. However, the consistently low means for all the subjects indicates a lack of competency in Practical Reasoning.

3. Overall, scores on the PAYES (except for subtest IA - Job-Holding Skills) were low for CVAE I subjects. These may be related to one of several possibilities. (a) Disadvantaged students are not motivated to take tests under the best of circumstances. (b) The testing time period in most cases covered successive days. The interest and motivational level may have dropped for these students, as the scores progressively declined, test by test. (c) The low scores accurately reflect poor attitudes and lack of competencies in basic employment skills; however, since subjects with work experience or those who had participated in CVAE for one year had significantly improved scores, it is concluded that a relative measure of competency had been gained by these subjects.

4. The factors of Status and Work show positive effects on the work attitudes and basic employment skills of CVAE I students in Georgia as measured by the PAYES. Scores for students with work experience were higher than those of students with no work experience. Scores for students with one year in CVAE combined with work experience were the highest on four of the six subtests. Employability is the bottom line for intervention programs such as CVAE. Therefore, it is concluded that students with work experience have achieved a more employable status, while those who have completed one year in CVAE and also have work experience have the knowledge to seek and obtain employment.

5. This study shows CVAE in Georgia to have positive pre-employment performance outcomes. The findings support the contention that programs such as CVAE and participation in work experience improve attitudes toward work, supervision, and self, and increase cognitive knowledge of jobs, job-seeking, and practical reasoning skills as measured by the PAYES.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are from this study.

1. Since scores attained on the PAYES by the CVAE subjects were below suggested competency levels, it is recommended that appropriate activities in the CVAE Curriculum be implemented to improve job knowledge, develop job-seeking and job holding skills, enhance self-confidence, and improve attitudes toward supervision, through counseling activities, and provide extensive practice in following directions.

2. Work experience is a recognized component of the CVAE program. The fact that the highest scores were recorded by those subjects with work experience suggests that this component should not only be included, but should also be emphasized in Georgia CVAE programs.

Implications

Recent syndicated news articles have questioned the validity of vocational education and work experience for high school aged youth. This study was undertaken to test the value of specific programatic curriculum for disadvantaged students and the value of their work experience in work experience. On the statistical findings of this study, recommendations listed above would seem to have valid implications for other programs desired for disadvantaged youth across the nation.

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